

Supporting digital inclusion in Cheshire and Merseyside: Our toolkit and approach (June 2023)

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1. Foreword

Undoubtedly, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to rising demand for digital services.

For a large proportion of our population, accessing information and services **online is now a normal part of everyday life**, with many routinely using the Internet for anything from online shopping to online banking due to the speed and convenience it affords.

As a result, expectation levels are now greater than they have ever been for health and social care services to be **digital by default**, with many already comfortable in the use of digital health services such as repeat prescription ordering and online consultations.

Digital has the potential to truly transform health and social care by ensuring our professionals have timely access to the information they need to make informed decisions, whilst empowering our population to play a more active role in their own health and care through access to online services, patient portals and remote monitoring.

Digital is also a key enabler - underpinning our local and national transformation plans and performing an integral role in supporting NHS sustainability targets and the drive towards Net Zero.

However, whilst there are many people who can embrace the use of digital, there are others within our region who find themselves **digitally excluded** and unable to use online services for a variety of reasons including lack of kit, skill, confidence or support.

For these individuals, the growing trend towards online services creates a **digital barrier** risking inequalities in health and care.

To help reduce these inequalities and support digital inclusion, the **Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care System's (ICS) Digital Inclusion Group** has produced this toolkit to provide those responsible for designing and delivering digital health and care services with the tools needed to improve access and support for those individuals who are, or are at risk of becoming, digitally excluded.

Inside you will find access to an interactive **Digital Exclusion Heatmap**, which uses local and national data sets to predict digital exclusion levels across the nine Places in Cheshire and Merseyside.

You will also be able to access **research findings** into the barriers to digital inclusion across our region, along with a **Digital Inclusion Impact Assessment** and guidance for use when planning new or reviewing existing digital health and social care services.

I strongly encourage all health and social care colleagues across Cheshire and Merseyside to **use the information contained within this toolkit** to ensure digital services are designed and delivered around the needs of our population.

Understanding the levels of digital exclusion that exist within our region and the barriers to digital inclusion will help us shape our public and patient engagement plans and will enable us to **target those most in need** with the most appropriate support mechanisms to ensure no one is left behind.

By supporting those people who can and want to become more digitally active and **overcoming the barriers to digital inclusion**, we can help lessen health inequalities and avoid exacerbating them through our increasing reliance on digital.

Ensuring **digital and non-digital options** are considered, will help us to retain equity of provision, improve access, understanding, and will help us meet the needs of the population we serve.

Prof. Rowan Pritchard-Jones

**Medical Director,
Cheshire and Merseyside
Integrated Care Board (ICB)**

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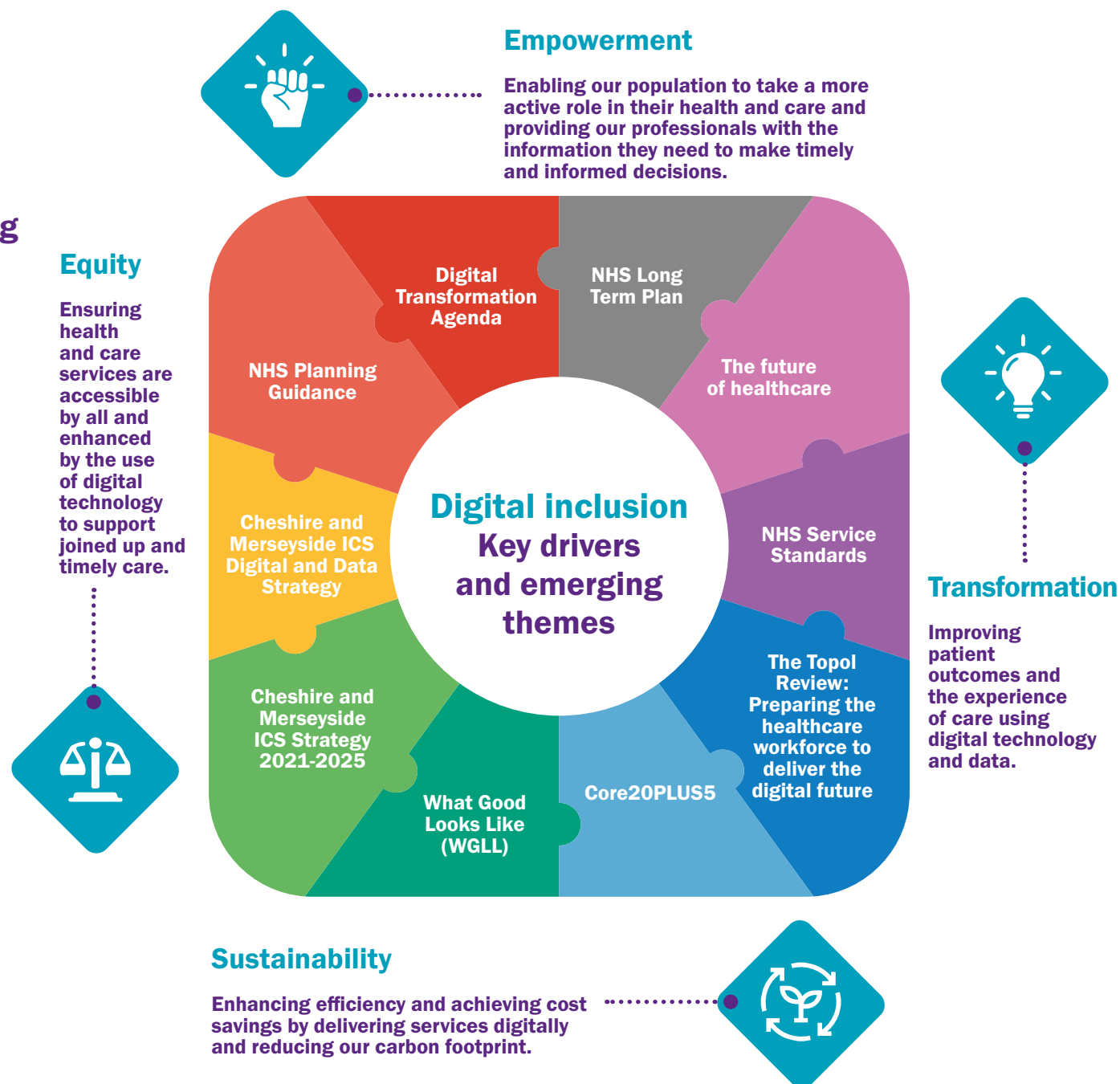
2. Introduction

Digital inclusion is a critical success factor for achieving our vision of having a digitally empowered population and there is system-wide commitment to delivering information and services digitally wherever appropriate.

Digital inclusion is about ensuring that everyone who can or wants to has the opportunity to access and engage with digital technologies or services as far as possible.

Digital inclusion matters in health and social care because it helps support local and national priorities surrounding self-care, long term condition management and empowerment, and reduces the risk of health inequalities.

Important commitments to digital inclusion have been made in **local and national guidance and strategies**, and several key themes have emerged for how digital inclusion will help support transformation, empowerment, equity, and sustainability.



There is a strong benefits case for embracing digital.

For our patients, the delivery of health and social care services digitally can mean better access to information, greater convenience, time savings and enhanced control of their own health and care. For our health and social care system, embracing digital can mean more effective delivery of care, better outcomes, improved efficiency and reduced costs.

For a large proportion of our population, accessing information and services online has now become a normal part of everyday life. However, for those people who are **digitally excluded** and don't have the necessary digital skills, connectivity, motivation or confidence to use digital technology, providing information and services digitally can cause a barrier increasing the risk of health and care inequalities.

In the UK, it is estimated that eleven million people (20% of the population) lack basic digital skills, or do not use digital technology at all. These people tend to be older, less educated and in poorer health than the rest of the population meaning they are also some of the heaviest users of health and social care services.

To help ensure digital health and social care services do not disadvantage the digitally excluded, care must be taken to implement interventions that help support digital inclusion, as well as ensuring **non-digital alternatives are always available** for those who can't, or do not wish to, access health and social care services digitally.

To support digital inclusion, this toolkit has been produced by the Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care System (ICS) Digital Inclusion Group to provide those responsible for designing and delivering digital health and care services with the tools needed to improve access and support for those individuals who are, or are at risk of becoming, digitally excluded.

The toolkit outlines the Cheshire and Merseyside approach to supporting digital inclusion, including an overview of our research within this field, and provides access to useful tools including a **Digital Exclusion Heatmap**, **findings into the barriers to digital inclusion** and a **Digital Inclusion Impact Assessment** to help ensure digital health and social care services are accessible to the widest possible audience without creating inequalities in health or care.

Key terms

Digital Inclusion

Ensuring that everyone who can or wants to has the opportunity to access and engage with digital technologies or services as far as possible.

Digital Exclusion

The barriers to being able to access digital technologies including, but not limited to: kit, connectivity, skills, affordability, motivation, trust, system design, confidence and awareness.



3. Our approach to digital inclusion

The Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care System (ICS) Digital Inclusion Group was established in November 2020 to help support digital inclusion and narrow the digital divide and the health inequalities gap.

The group brought together digital inclusion leads and subject matter experts from the nine Places in Cheshire and Merseyside to work collaboratively to improve digital inclusion and support those who are digitally excluded to access digital services or non-digital alternatives.

Lessons learnt from a successful **Kit Recycling Project**, undertaken as part of the Digital First Primary Care Programme (DFPC) in 2021, demonstrated the positive impact digital technology can have on health outcomes and the fact that digital exclusion is not a barrier when appropriate support is provided and there is a willingness to embrace digital health and care services.

From this work, it was recognised that more needed to be done to identify and support those who are digitally excluded by addressing the barriers to digital inclusion.

Funding secured in the consecutive year provided the opportunity to conduct research in this area, so that as a system we could identify those most at risk of digital exclusion and implement tailored interventions to help support digital inclusion or at very least, ensure non-digital alternatives are available for those who cannot access digital health and care services or do not wish to.

Two workstreams were established to progress **our approach to supporting digital inclusion** in Cheshire and Merseyside.



To help develop our understanding of where digital inclusion efforts should be targeted, **workstream 1** involved using local and national data sets around common causes for digital exclusion to create an interactive Digital Exclusion Heatmap for Cheshire and Merseyside.

Using the heatmap, it is possible to identify those most at risk from digital exclusion in Cheshire and Merseyside and then use this information when designing and encouraging the use of new digital health and care services - helping us target support where it is needed most.

You can find out more and access the Digital Exclusion Heatmap on [page 11](#).

Workstream 2 involved conducting quantitative and qualitative research to learn more about the barriers to digital inclusion across Cheshire and Merseyside and to identify interventions that might help increase digital adoption for both the digitally included and the digitally excluded.

Population research to inform public health messaging and campaigns has proved extremely effective in the past, particularly within our region where this data has been used successfully to help encourage vaccination uptake among our Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities.

Our research approach included:



An **online survey** of 1,015 digitally enabled people to capture the drivers for, and barriers against, accessing NHS services online.



A **street survey** of 275 digitally excluded people to capture the drivers for, and barriers against, accessing NHS services online.



18 in-depth interviews were conducted with NHS staff and organisations delivering care and support to disadvantaged communities and hard to reach groups to better understand the drivers for, and barriers against, accessing NHS services online.



Focus group sessions and interviews were held with digitally enabled and digitally excluded people to explore the drivers and barriers to accessing NHS services online in greater detail.

You can find out more about the barriers to digital inclusion in Cheshire and Merseyside by referring to our research findings on [page 12](#).

4. Our recommendations

All health and social care colleagues across Cheshire and Merseyside are encouraged to use the tools and research findings contained within this toolkit to ensure digital health and care services are designed and delivered around the needs of our population.

It is recommended that the **Digital Exclusion Heatmap** (found on [page 11](#)) is used to identify those areas in our region that are the most digitally excluded so that appropriate support mechanisms can be put in place to improve digital inclusion and deliver non-digital alternatives to avoid inequalities in health and care. A **Digital Exclusion Impact Assessment** is available on [page 13](#) to support this process.

By referring to our research findings on [page 12](#), there are some **specific barriers to using digital services** which our support mechanisms and communications approach must address including:

- Lack of trust - concerns over data privacy and security
- Lack of digital skill or confidence
- Lack of digital kit or connectivity to the Internet
- Lack of will due to not being aware of the benefits

Beyond the classifications of ‘digitally included’ and ‘digitally excluded’, research has highlighted that **our people can be categorised into five groups**. Having an understanding of the specific needs or concerns of these groups will help us tailor our communications and support offerings.



Digitally Activated - People who can use the Internet and online services confidently and see the benefits.



Digitally Uninspired - People who can use the Internet and online services but don't understand the benefits or lack the motivation.



Digitally Doubtful - People who have genuine concerns about the use of the Internet and online services, such as fears about information security, or a lack of trust in the organisation or service itself.



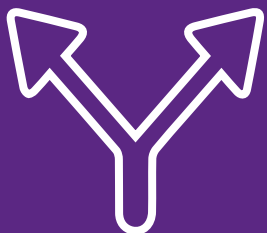
Digitally Interested - People who are interested in the use of the Internet and online services but don't know how to use it or need support.



Digitally Unable - People who can't or do not wish to access the Internet or online services.

To support digital inclusion in Cheshire and Merseyside, it is recommended that we:

Follow a two-tiered strategy



We need to address the needs and concerns of the digitally included and the digitally excluded by providing non-digital alternatives for those who don't want to or are unable to access online services, whilst providing training and support for those who might.

Promote the benefits



We need to promote the personal benefits of using NHS services online, tailoring our messages to address the key barriers and needs of the five different categories of people on **page 9**. Our health and social care workforce will also perform a key role in promoting the benefits of digital health and care services and need to be supported to ensure they have the necessary skills to use these services confidently.

Increase uptake of the NHS App



We need to make improvements to the design and functionality of the NHS App to encourage use. Currently there are too many competing apps available and the NHS App needs to be extended to help drive adoption - being able to book appointments and view medical records were viewed as essential features.

Address the issues with other digital health and care services



In order to encourage uptake of digital services, there needs to be clear benefit. Poor user experience of digital health and care services such as online consultations can cause a barrier to wider digital adoption. We need to act on feedback and co-design our digital health and care services so that they meet the needs of our population.

5. Cheshire and Merseyside Digital Exclusion Heatmap

The Cheshire and Merseyside Digital Inclusion Heatmap is an interactive tool that aims to help increase access to digital services for individuals who are, or are at risk of becoming, digitally excluded.

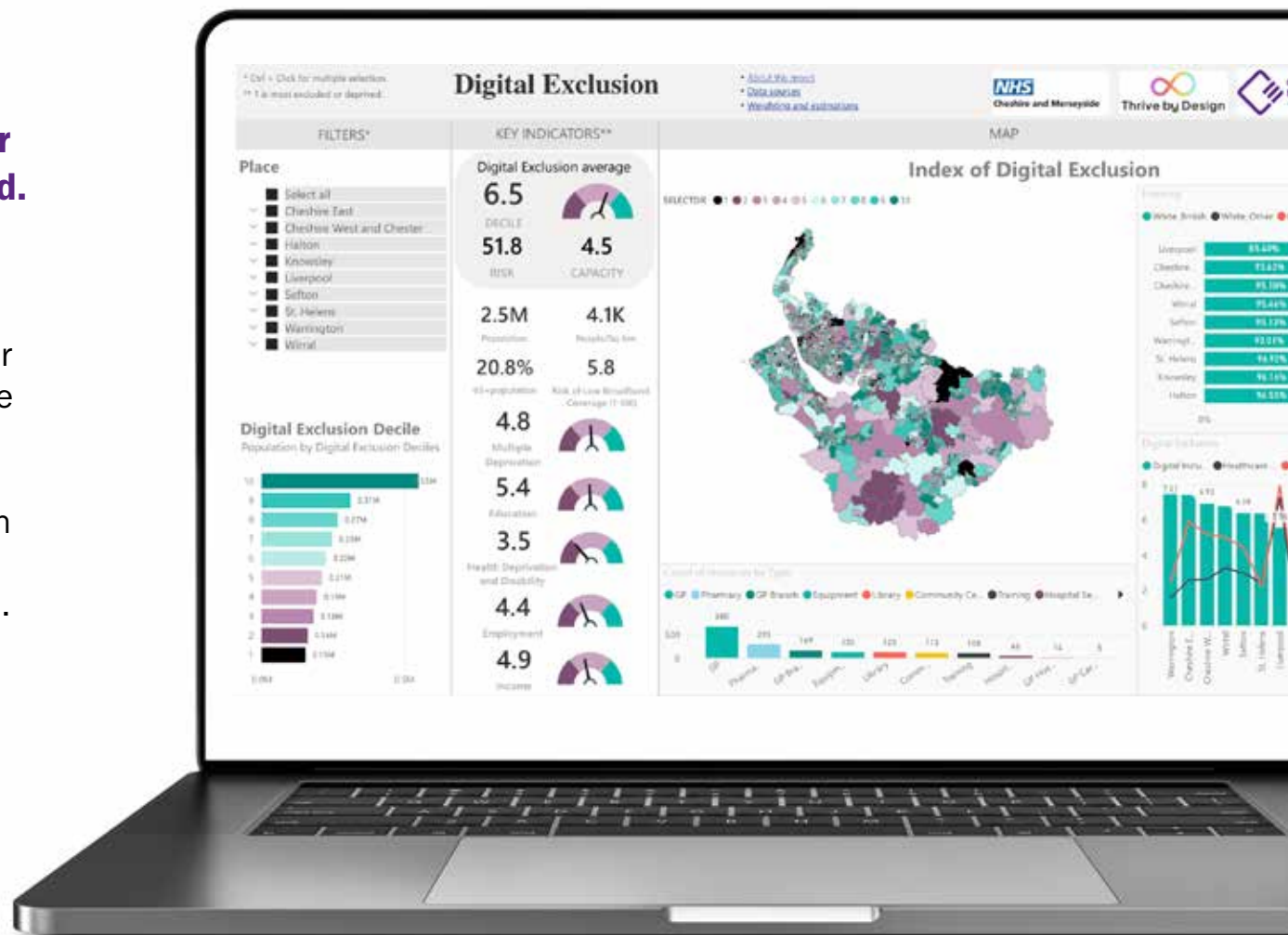
The tool was co-designed with partners Thrive by Design and representatives from primary and secondary care, local authorities, and third sector organisations from all nine Places in the Cheshire and Merseyside region.

To predict the likelihood of digital exclusion within the region, the tool uses local and national data sets around common causes for digital exclusion.

Having an understanding of the levels of digital exclusion that exist within our region will enable health and care colleagues across Cheshire and Merseyside to take practical steps and activities, to increase access to digital services for specific groups of people or Places.

To access the Digital Exclusion Heatmap visit:

<https://bit.ly/42sDXqg>



6. Research findings into the barriers to digital inclusion

The Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care System (ICS) commissioned Influential, an award-winning marketing communications agency, to undertake research to investigate the barriers to digital inclusion, to help identify interventions that might help increase the adoption of digital health and care services.

Surveys were conducted between May 2022 and June 2022 with people living in Cheshire and Merseyside to capture the drivers for, and barriers against, accessing NHS services online. The surveys included an **online survey** of 1,015 digitally enabled people and a **street survey** of 275 digitally excluded people.

Between July 2022 and August 2022, 18 **in-depth interviews** were conducted with NHS staff and organisations delivering care and support to disadvantaged communities and hard to reach groups to better understand the drivers for, and barriers against, accessing NHS services online. Hard to reach groups included older people, travelling communities, adults with mental health support needs and young adults leaving care.

Throughout September 2022, **focus group sessions and interviews** were held with digitally enabled and digitally

excluded people in Cheshire and Merseyside to explore the drivers and barriers to accessing NHS services online in greater detail and to identify opportunities for enhancing digital adoption.

An overview of the research findings can be found below, along with a summary overview.



[Read the full research findings into the barriers to digital inclusion in Cheshire and Merseyside](#)



[Read the summary of our research findings into the barriers to digital inclusion in Cheshire and Merseyside](#)

7. The Cheshire and Merseyside Digital Inclusion Impact Assessment

The Cheshire and Merseyside Digital Inclusion Impact Assessment tool has been designed to help assess the impact of digital exclusion and support us to make a positive impact on the lives of those affected by this.


The Digital Inclusion Impact Assessment tool provides a comprehensive framework to guide health and care colleagues on how digital services could impact those who are digitally-excluded.

The tool provides a step-by-step approach to help identify the issues and challenges associated with digital exclusion and determine the best course of action to address these issues through the provision of support to or non-digital alternatives.

The tool has been designed based on evidence and findings from the Digital Inclusion Programme's research into the barriers to digital inclusion in Cheshire and Merseyside. This tool should be used alongside your organisation's Equality/Quality Impact Assessment form.

To access the Digital Inclusion Impact Assessment tool visit:

<https://www.cheshireandmerseyside.nhs.uk/media/qbnpcx4i/digital-inclusion-impact-assessment-combined-logos-130623.docx>


Cheshire and Merseyside

Digital Inclusion Impact Assessment
INSERT PROJECT/PROGRAMME NAME

Date of assessment :		
Programme/Project/Service/System Start Date:		
ICB Digital Inclusion Service (Digital Programmes Team) Signature and Date:		
Project/Programme Finish Date:		
Authorising Signature, Role and Date		
Impact Assessment Review date (recommendation 6/12 monthly review) :		

Programme/Project/Service/System Details

Name of transformation Programme/Project/Service/System being assessed	Title of the Programme/Project/Service/System being assessed
Summary of aims and objectives	Describe the project/programme including: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Scope- Objectives and strategy- Stakeholders Digital Technology being deployed
Who is affected by the transformation Programme/Project/Service/System? (public/patient/workforce)	Outline the main stakeholders and those affected by the digital transformation work. A detailed stakeholder/involved persons map should be completed
What involvement and engagement has been done in relation to this Programme/Project/Service/System ? (e.g. with relevant groups and stakeholders)	Describe the engagement and involvement of stakeholders in this work; specifically ensuring that all relevant considerations have been made

Find out more

You can find out more about our plans to support digital inclusion across Cheshire and Merseyside by visiting:
www.cheshireandmerseyside.nhs.uk

